CLAIMS

1. A computer implemented system for administering a distribution channel for the promotion and sale of a product, comprising:

a digital repository;

a processor coupled to the digital repository; and

a computer readable medium encoded with processor readable instructions that when executed by the processor implement,

a member management mechanism configured to maintain data in the digital repository corresponding to a member of the distribution channel,

a product management mechanism configured to maintain data in the digital repository corresponding to a product provided by the member,

a consumer interface mechanism configured to provide a consumer with access to data in the digital repository corresponding to the product via a wide area network and to allow the consumer to provide an indicator for the product, and

a lead generating mechanism configured to create a lead including data corresponding to the product and the consumer based on the indicator provided by the consumer, and to forward the lead to the member of the distribution channel via the wide area network.

2. The system of Claim 1, wherein the member of the distribution channel is at least one of a vendor, an independent agency, a franchisee, or a co-op member.

3. The system of Claim 1, wherein the member of the distribution channel is an independent travel agency.

1   4. The system of Claim 1, wherein the product comprises at least one of a travel-

2 related product and a travel-related service.

1   5. The system of Claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the wide area network

2 comprises an Internet protocol based network.

1   6. The system of Claim 5, wherein at least a portion of the wide area network

2 comprises the Internet.

1   7. The system of Claim 1, wherein the digital repository comprises a database.

1   8. The system of Claim 1, wherein the processor readable instructions comprises at

2 least one of a dynamic link library, a static link library, a script, a COLDFUSION

3 application, a JAVA class, a C++ class, and a C library routine.

1   9. The system of Claim 1, wherein the member management mechanism is further

2 configured to provide a sharing of information among a plurality of members.

1   10. The system of Claim 9, wherein the sharing of information is through at least one

2 of a bulletin board and an e-mail capability.

1   11. The system of Claim 1, wherein the computer readable medium is further

2 encoded with processor readable instructions that when executed by the processor further

3 implement,

4   a member web site building mechanism configured to provide the member with tools

5 to build a member web site providing access to at least a portion of the digital repository.

1   12. The system of Claim 1, wherein the consumer interface mechanism is further

2 configured to provide the consumer with access to a vendor supplying the product.

1   13. The system of Claim 1, wherein the lead generating mechanism is further

2 configured to send a reminder via the wide area network to the member receiving the lead

3 when the member has not followed up on the lead within a predetermined amount of time.

   14. The system of Claim 13, wherein the reminder is sent via e-mail.

1   15. A method for administering a distribution channel for the promotion and sale of a

2 product, comprising the steps of:

3   populating a digital repository with data relating to a member of the distribution

4 channel;

5   populating the digital repository with data relating to a product of interest to

6 consumers of the distribution channel, the product being provided by the member;

7   providing a consumer with access to the digital repository via a wide area network;

8   identifying the product as being of interest to the consumer;

9   generating a lead including data corresponding to the product identified in the

10 identifying step and the consumer; and

11   forwarding the lead generated in the generating step to the member of the distribution

12 channel via the wide area network.

1   16. The method of Claim 15, wherein the member comprises at least one of a vendor,

2   an independent agency, a franchisee, or a co-op member.

1   17. The method of Claim 15, wherein the product comprises at least one of a travel-

2   related product and a travel-related service.

1   18. The method of Claim 15, wherein at least a portion of the wide area network

2   comprises an Internet protocol based network.

1   19. The method of Claim 18, wherein the wide area network comprises the Internet.

1   20. The method of Claim 15, wherein the digital repository comprises a database.

1   21. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of building by the member a

2   web site providing access to the digital repository using a tool provided by a manager of the

3   distribution channel.

1   22. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of communicating by the

2   member with another member of the distribution channel via the wide area network using a

3   tool provided by a manager of the distribution channel.

1   23. The method of Claim 22, wherein the tool comprises at least one of a bulletin

2   board and an e-mail capability.

1   24. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of sending the member

2   receiving the lead in the forwarding step a reminder via the wide area network if the lead has

3   not been followed up on within a predetermined amount of time.

1   25. The method of Claim 24, wherein the reminder comprises an e-mail message.

1   26. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of providing a consumer

2   with direct access to the member providing the product.

1   27. The method of Claim 15, wherein the product comprises a special promotion

2   being offered to consumers of the distribution channel.

1   28. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of ordering by the member

2   collateral material from a vendor of the product.

1   29. The method of Claim 28 wherein the collateral material comprises a brochure

2   relating to the product.

1   30. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of order by the member

2   collateral material from a manager of the distribution channel.

1   31. The method of Claim 30, wherein the collateral material comprises at least one of

2   a periodical provided by the manager and a calendar of promotions being offered by the

3   distribution channel.

1   32. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of populating the digital

2   repository with information relating to at least one of a certification and a specialization of

3   the member.

1   33. The method of Claim 32, further comprising the step of querying by the

2   consumer for a desired member based on the information in the digital repository relating to

3   the at least one of the certification and the specialization of the member.

1   34. The method of Claim 15, further comprising the step of querying by the

2   consumer for a desired member based on at least one of a member geographic location and a

3   member name.

1   35. A system for administering a distribution channel for the promotion and sale of a

2   product, comprising:

3   means for populating a digital repository with data relating to a member of the

4   distribution channel;

5   means for populating the digital repository with data relating to a product of interest

6   to consumers of the distribution channel, the product being provided by the member;

7   means for providing a consumer with access to the digital repository via a wide area

8   network;

9   means for identifying the product as being of interest to the consumer;

10   means for generating a lead including data corresponding to the product identified by

11   the means for identifying and the consumer; and

12   means for forwarding the lead generated by the means for generating to the member

13   of the distribution channel via the wide area network.

1   36. A computer program product, comprising:

2   a computer storage medium; and

3   a computer program code mechanism embedded in the computer storage medium for

4   causing a computer to manage a distribution channel for the promotion and sale of a product,

5   the computer program code mechanism having,

6   a first computer code device configured to maintain data in a digital repository

7   relating to a member of a distribution channel;

8   a second computer code device configured to maintain data in the digital repository

9   relating to a product provided by the member;

10   a third computer code device configured to provide a consumer with access to the

11   digital repository via a wide area network;

12   a fourth computer code device configured to enable the consumer to indicate that the

13   product is of interest;

14   a fifth computer code device configured to create a lead including data corresponding

15   to the product and the consumer; and

16   a sixth computer code device configured to send the lead to the member via the wide area

17   network.

1   37. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the member comprises at

2   least one of a vendor, an independent agency, a franchisee, or a co-op member.

1   38. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the product comprises at

2   least one of a travel-related product and a travel-related service.

-30-

1   39. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the digital repository

2 comprises a database.

1   40. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein at least a portion of the wide

2 area network comprises the Internet.

1   41. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   a seventh computer code device configured to enable the member to create a web site

4 for accessing the data in the digital repository.

1   42. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   a seventh computer code device configured to enable the member to communicate

4 with another member of the distribution channel via the wide area network.

1   43. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the sixth computer code

2 device is further configured to send the member a reminder via the wide area network when

3 the lead has not been followed up on within a predetermined amount of time.

1   44. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the third computer code

2 device is further configured to provide the consumer with access to the member providing the

3 product via the wide area network.

1 45. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   a seventh computer code device configured to enable the member to order collateral

4 material from a vendor of the product via the wide area network.

1 46. The computer program product of Claim 45, wherein the collateral material

2 comprises a brochure relating to the product.

1 47. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   a seventh computer code device configured to enable the member to order collateral

4 material from a manager of the distribution channel via the wide area network.

1 48. The computer program product of Claim 47, wherein the collateral material

2 comprises at least one of a periodical provided by the manager and a calendar of promotions

3 being offered by the distribution channel.

1 49. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   a seventh computer code device configured to enable the member to populate the

4 digital repository with information relating to at least one of a certification and a

5 specialization of the member.

1 50. The computer program product of Claim 49, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   an eighth computer code device configured to enable the consumer to query for a

4 desired member based on information in the digital repository relating to the at least one of

5 the certification and the specialization of the member.

1   51. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

2 mechanism further having,

3   a seventh computer code device configured to enable the consumer to query the digital

4 repository for a desired member based on at least one of a member geographic location and a

5 member name.

      52. The computer program product of Claim 36, wherein the computer program code

mechanism further having,

      a seventh computer code device configured to enable the member to complete

requisite training for receiving a certification.